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PLATO AS A PLAYWRIGHT

BY LOUIS DYER

SINCE 1872, when I was welcomed by Professor Goodwin into the charmed circle of the Socrates portrayed in Plato's earlier and middle period of authorship,—the circle of the Platonic and of the Platonizing Socrates as I now venture to put it,—I have been pre-occupied with the exhibition in these unparalleled dramatizations of what may be called Plato's skill as a playwright. Jowett, although he has truly said¹ that "we lose the better half of Plato when we regard his Dialogues merely as literary compositions," has constantly² drawn attention to "resemblances to the Greek drama" which "may be noted in all the Dialogues of Plato;" Lewis Nettleship was never tired of illustrating the part played by dramatic intention and effectiveness in the arguments of Plato's *Republic*,³ and much that is illuminating in Pater's *Plato and Platonism* applies specifically to our author's dramatic craftsmanship.⁴ Nevertheless, so long as there was no widely recognized scheme of the order in which Plato wrote his Dialogues, it was out of the question to attempt any connected account of the part played in the unfolding of his philosophic mind by Plato's dramatic genius.

Such a scheme has now appeared, and that fact must excuse the following attempt to distinguish a growth and a decay in Plato's art as a playwright⁵ and to mark out three stages in the evolution of the

¹ *Introduction to the Phaedrus*, p. 409.

² See especially his *Introduction to the Phædo*, *ad fin.*

³ *Lectures and Remains*, II, *passim*; see especially pp. 6-11.

⁴ pp. 6 and 66-88.

⁵ A full generation since, Professor Lewis Campbell grouped the *Sophist*, the *Statesman*, and the *Philebus* with the *Timæus*, the *Critias*, and the *Laws*, immemorably recognized as Plato's latest works. This gave a well-defined third period of authorship. The first period has always been supposed to include the *Apology*, the *Euthyphro*, the *Crito*, the *Charmides*, and two or three other short Dialogues termed Socratic par excellence. It has been reserved for Mr. W. Lutoslawski, chiefly by marshalling compactly in his pages scattered work already done by several scholars

philosophic Dialogue as he used it. Others who are recognized authorities in metaphysics may accept Mr. Lutoslawski's chronology on philosophical grounds,¹ but my reasons for welcoming it and adopting it are more superficial. I find it easy to accept because the evidence offered in its support is not of a metaphysical kind, and I feel that it is lawful to follow Mr. Lutoslawski's lead even if one has not the wit to frame any connected opinions about the deep questions of Plato's philosophy.

Our philosopher has many and subtle devices for dramatizing his logic. Thus, at least, we are prone to put it, forcing upon Plato our own point of view, and forgetting that the experience of a long life spent in hard thinking was required before Plato dreamed of undramatized logic, of any form of argument that could be effective without a compelling personality represented in the very act of using it. Full of the power lent him by the life and teaching of Socrates, Plato in writing of the Platonic Socrates, seems to have thought with Homer that words like arrows could be winged things when aimed by the right man, but not otherwise. Disenchanted later on in the midst of his most mature achievements, masterpieces of the fully developed dramatic Dialogue where the protagonist is the Platonizing Socrates, Plato reflected bitterly that words,—to whatsoever speaker they might be dramatically assigned, became inert and helpless things as soon as they were written down. *Litera scripta manet*, the written word remains,—“to be bandied about promiscuously, understood or misunderstood, and, if maltreated, it has no parent to keep it from harm.”² This disenchantment of Plato's was so genuine that he abandoned authorship and confined himself presumably to oral teaching for twelve years more or less. But he ended by thinking better of it and produced two more Dialogues, the *Theaetetus* and the *Parmenides*. In these works he still practised his perfected

on Platonic chronology, to complete the first or Socratic group with the *Protagoras*, the *Euthydemus*, the *Meno*, and the *Gorgias*, and to establish a middle group of the *Cratylus*, the *Symposium*, the *Phaedo*, the *Republic*, the *Phaedrus*, the *Theaetetus*, and the *Parmenides*. See his recent work on Plato's *Logic*, 1897 (Longmans).

¹ If I understood the lectures on Plato given in 1897 by the Master of Balliol, he accepted Mr. Lutoslawski's chronology as offering the right basis for following the growth of Plato's philosophy. I should also venture to surmise that Mr. Henry Jackson would be of like mind.

² *Phaedrus*, 275 E.

dramatic craft, before carrying out in practice a self-denying ordinance which exiled from his latest works the dramatic figure of Socrates. Thus at the last our author abandoned his dramatic philosophizing, and wrote Dialogues which were in reality philosophical treatises more or less of the kind still in vogue. For this reason Plato's last six works, the *Sophist*, the *Statesman*, the *Philebus*, the *Timaeus*, the *Cratylus*, and the *Lysis* may here be left out of account. We might, in fact, say that Plato, like Raphael, had his third or Roman manner which was continued by other hands when he was no more, and which was as radically different from his two earlier manners as were Raphael's Peruginesque and Florentine works from his later ones.

In several of his Dialogues we find that the opening has peculiar dramatic interest, and this may serve as a reminder that, in dramatic works more than those of any arts except Poetry, Oratory, and Music, Aristotle's doctrine holds true that everything depends upon the beginning,¹ inasmuch as many things that exercise our minds can be cleared up then and there. What then shall we say of the dramatic interest of the first work written by Plato, the *Apology*, which portrays Socrates as Plato saw him pleading not so much for his life, as for his life-work, losing his case, and leaving the court condemned to death? Most of the things that exercise our minds when we read the earliest group of Plato's writings are cleared up in the *Apology*. It was this unforgettable drama which made of Plato the dramatist of philosophy. Like Xenophon and others among the disciples of Socrates, Plato was stung into authorship. Indignation made him determined to record the most unspeakably important events within the range of his experience. Doubtless what others may have written gave him an additional incentive, forced him to portray Socrates as he knew him, — the Platonic Socrates. Plato's mind in this regard is quite simply expressed when St. Luke says to Theophilus, "Inasmuch as many have taken in hand to draw up a narrative concerning these matters which have been fulfilled among us . . . it seemed good to me also, having traced the course of all things accurately from the first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus."

¹ *Eth. Nicomach.* 1098 b, 7: δοκεῖ γὰρ πλεῖον ἢ ἡμῖν παντὸς εἶναι ἡ ἀρχή, καὶ πολλὰ συμφανῇ γίνεσθαι δι' αὐτῆς τῶν ζητούμενων.

In the *Apology* then we may safely seek the main outlines of the Platonic Socrates, with the confident expectation of finding there the right clue to the main drift and dramatic import of the other works of Plato's first period. We find dialogues in the *Apology*; (1) narrated conversations (20 E) and (2) dramatic dialogues (24 D, E, and 27 B, C). These are Plato's Socratic Dialogues in embryo, which serve to illustrate, in just the manner of the short dialogues next produced by Plato, the prefatory account of Socratic diction and argument put into Socrates' own mouth at the beginning of the *Apology*.¹ Perhaps the best indication that the *Euthyphro*, the *Crito*, the *Charmides*, the *Laches*, and the *Lysis* must be classed with the *Apology* is to be found by abstracting from the *Apology* a general outline such as can be filled in by details supplied in the shorter dialogues. Socrates represents himself (1) as so rooted in Athens that he can only do his work by identifying himself with the Athenian community. This function, however, excludes him from public official duty since it is that of a father or an elder brother; it also requires him to have no private or family concerns, and he accordingly entrusts the education of his sons to the good men of Athens.²

(2) This discharge of his function made him obnoxious. People would not stand cross-examination, and yet to cross-examine³ was a duty laid upon him by Apollo; he was a heaven-sent gad-fly, sent to sting the body politic, and he had guidance from above in what he did as well as in what he left undone.

(3) He never took pay, never made special favourites or bore a grudge against anyone; but, as his commission required, he gave what he had to every chance comer, taking no thought but talking in a casual and unstudied manner.

(4) His care for the right education of the young was the root of all his thoughts and actions, the great positive element underlying superficial doubts and hesitations, — the splendid quality which made him

¹ 17 D, E, and 18.

² *Apology ad fin.*

³ Appropriately enough the Greek inscription of Jowett's memorial tablet in Balliol College Chapel is from the *Apology*, 38 A: ὁ δὲ ἀνέτακτος βίος οὐ βιωτὸς ἀνθρώπων.

stand out head and shoulders above all his contemporaries small and great, foolish and wise.

With some such general map of the realm occupied by Socrates, which every reader can abstract for himself from the *Apology*, the whole drift of the shorter dialogues above enumerated becomes easy to understand. All the above leading points are woven into the *Euthyphro*. In the *Crito* the first of them is brought into prominence. The first two are especially emphasized, along with the last, in the *Charmides*, where the heaven-sent charm of Socrates is dramatically wrought out, along with his unstudied naturalness and good nature,— the third point abstracted above from the *Apology*. The like is true of the *Laches*, where, however, the disconcerting effect of Socratic discourse upon grave and reverend seniors is especially marked, while in the *Lysis* is shown the Master's subtle sympathy with the very young. Thus we realize that Plato's five earliest works might have been planned in order to convey a definitely intended portrait of Socrates at his work among all classes in Athens. The mistake would be to suppose that Plato means Socrates to lay down a special doctrine or to be always logical or even free from occasional subterfuges and tortuous twists in argument. It is not the doctrine of Socrates,— for Socrates had no doctrine in our strict sense of the word,— it is the man Socrates whom Plato portrays from the life, as Philosophy made flesh and walking among the sons of men.

Having finished these *genre*-pictures, where Socrates is put upon the stage along with average types of contemporary Athenians, old and young, Plato next undertook to put on a larger stage one of the most striking dramatic interludes of the *Apology*,¹ where he discusses the oracle given to Chaerephon at Delphi to the effect that Socrates was the wisest of men. Accordingly we now come upon a group of Dialogues, still belonging to Plato's first manner and still aimed at portraying the Platonic Socrates, but portraying him no longer as the only principal figure. Having in the shorter Socratic Dialogues flashed innumerable side lights upon the leading phases of his great personage, Plato now trusts us to give him due attention when he is treading the boards with men of great intellectual mark. In the *Protagoras*, the *Meno*, the

¹ 21 and 22.

Euthydemus, and the *Gorgias*, Socrates' quality is tried by a new and more searching test. Plato's plots grow more complicated, and the varied play and practice of his *mises-en-scène* are more subtle. The portrait of the *Apology* may be likened to a first sketch in Black and White; in the short dialogues we have *genre-scenes* of finished colouring, and we note successive efforts in dramatic construction which are Plato's constant attempts to frame his pictures, to achieve a harmonious setting for the portrait of his Master. Now in the last among his dialogues of portrayal, his practised hand essays a series of Historical paintings.

Indeed, as we read the *Protagoras*, the first of these *oeuvres de longue haleine*, we look back almost with a smile to the *Lysis*, where conversation no sooner began to run smoothly than the boys' Nurses intervened and took them home to bed.¹ It was easy to discuss courage with rough and ready soldiers like Laches, whose intellectual joints were always a trifle stiff, and with such typical "heavy fathers" as Lysimachus and Melesias, and it required no more than his prentice hand to enable Socrates to lay down the law about temperance, justice and friendship in the boy-assemblies of Athenian palaestras; nor could the unfathomable superficiality of Euthyphro serve for anything but a foil to the Platonic Socrates. But matters grow more serious when we see that Plato, having commenced Playwright in these shorter works, brings Socrates before us trying conclusions with Protagoras and Gorgias, rising superior to the practised tricks of Euthydemus and Dionysodorus, and calmly braving the implacable animosity of Anytus, Anytus whom he holds ultimately responsible for the adverse verdict that condemned him.² In these scenes Plato shows himself a master of the playwright's art.

The dramatic elaboration resorted to in getting under way the main action of the *Protagoras* is something new. The nearest approach to it has been in the *Lysis*, where Plato lingers over the preliminary scenes, and betrays for the moment a certain preoccupation with dramatic

¹ 223 A.

² *Apology*, 36 A: This passage in the *Apology*, without the light thrown upon it by the *Alcibiades* (90-94), seems curiously pointless, — little more, indeed, than a piece of Socratic mystification. See also *Apology*, 29 D and 30 B, where Anytus is singled out as the really dangerous and determined accuser, and contrast the almost affectionate account of Meletus with which the *Euthyphro* opens.

intricacies for their own sake. The fruits of this we gather in the *Protagoras*, where this practised dramatic craftsmanship is brought to its bearings. The new dramatic device most obvious and, from an artistic point of view, least important in the *Protagoras* is its wholly detached prologue. This, however, results in a narrative form for the main dialogue, where Plato, like a skilled engineer, lays his first parallel at a distance from the fort he intends to storm, introducing Socrates as in the *Lysis* long before he brings him to where the other main characters are.

This narrative form was especially convenient for what Plato had momentarily in hand, since it made easy the numerous asides that call attention to the diverting gyrations of the smaller fry whom we see hanging on the lips of Protagoras, Prodicus, and Hippias, and was a means of bringing out by parenthetical comment the various humours and fads of the great men themselves. Apart from this question of dramatic convenience, Plato's new invention of a completely detached prologue has no technical importance. He made the most of this invention for dramatic purposes in his subsequent period of authorship when he was portraying the Platonizing Socrates of his second manner. Perhaps, though, a certain and minor dramatic value attaches to Plato's first use, in the *Protagoras*, of the wholly detached prologue, for we may regard it as a dramatized title-page useful as giving due notice that our author's stage is no longer to be monopolized by Socrates. Thus we note that Plato takes a leaf out of Euripides' book in order to announce, in what we may call a Euripidean prologue, that he is in the act of completing his portrait of Socrates by bringing him on a stage where he will at least technically be subordinated to Protagoras, who outranks him in years and reputation.

Corresponding to the enlargement of Plato's stage, we have now, underlying his prevailing mood of Socratic portraiture, the threads of a new and profound philosophy that carries us beyond the horizon of Socrates. These threads are inextricably woven into the narrated conversations so that we cannot attribute a monopoly of truth to any of the conversing personages. Here is a beginning of what soon forces the Platonic Socrates from Plato's stage and brings on in his place the Platonizing Socrates. But apart from this it concerns us here to note the graces and the delicacies of dramatic resourcefulness lavished by

Plato in order to preserve the dignity of Protagoras, the man of importance, while at the same time he reveals in the young Socrates a mind of far greater flexibility, and a heart of deeper resolve, — the promise in fact of a far better man than the eminent Protagoras. Socrates becomes, in the cosmopolitan atmosphere of the *Protagoras*, almost a man of the world, but with a difference quite sufficient to remind us that Apollo called him wise.

For all that, even Shakespeare has hardly outdone the subtlety of humorous characterization shown by Plato in the *Protagoras*, where our author betrays a Shakesperian quality also in the more farcical by-play that centres around Hippias and Prodicus. Doubtless, Plato felt in his day the truth conveyed in the French saying: *rira bien qui rit le dernier*, and was spurred on by popular Aristophanesque caricatures of Socrates until he brought the laughers to side with his master. In spite of its good fun, however, the *Protagoras* leaves us with a serious impression of Socrates. He was in earnest, we feel, about serious matters, and thus we are prepared for the roaring farce of the *Euthydemus*, and enabled to get from beneath it sobering glimpses of a curiously consistent and almost dogmatizing Socrates. At all events the Platonic Socrates in this dialogue shows that he is master of the field in spite of the buffoonery of his antagonists in argument and of his genuine enjoyment of their gasconades.

On the score of dramatic consistency Plato makes with his *Euthydemus* a step in advance. The detached prologue here consists of a Dialogue with Crito. This is cut short by a narrative of Socrates' encounters with Dionysodorus and Euthydemus, which are interrupted in the middle by further talk between Socrates and his friend, who also round out the whole by a short conversation at the end. Thus Plato brings to completion the notion of a Dialogue within a Dialogue, which had plainly been working in his mind since he wrote the *Charmides* and the *Lysis*. The full dramatic possibilities of this elaborate form were not, however, realized by him until he wrought them out in the *Phaedo* which is, dramatically speaking, his masterpiece.

The *Gorgias* is far less complex than the *Euthydemus* and the *Protagoras*, though it comes after them. It has a prologue, which, however, is not wholly detached. It has the same function, as a sort of title-page, performed by the Prologue of the *Protagoras*, but, not being detached,

it does not cumber our author with the narrative form for his main discourse. It is a sort of flourish of trumpets to introduce that Prince of Persuasion, Gorgias of Leontini. Here are no satirical asides, and our author "saves the face" of the illustrious Gorgias by keeping him for the most part out of the fray, which grows rather warm between the Platonic Socrates and Polus, figuring as the "understudy" of Gorgias. Simplicity, clearness of purpose, and directness are the notes of this remarkable work, the dramatic form of which is therefore less complex than that of its predecessors. These characteristics are not allowed, however, to interfere with a half reasoned and half mystical amplification by Socrates of the almost sentimental idealism of the closing pages in the *Apology*. What was put there for the popular understanding is here more philosophically interpreted. In this interpretation, as also here and there in the *Protagoras* and the *Euthydemus*, Socrates has grown so much surer of his ground than he was in the *Apology* as to lose now and again the "know-nothing" note of the Platonic Socrates. He is suffering before our eyes a change into the Platonizing Socrates of the works which immediately follow.

Before turning to those works, and to Plato's second period of authorship, we must consider the *Meno*, which came chronologically between the *Protagoras* and the *Euthydemus*, but was passed over that we might treat together Plato's three historical pictures of Socrates and typical sophists of his day. The *Meno*, too, contains premonitions of the Platonizing Socrates in the short passage (81 C-86) dealing with the transmigration of souls and explaining our power to learn as a faculty for remembering. The episodic character of this discussion may mean that Plato had not yet thought the question out. Indeed, this topic is more appropriate to the Platonizing Socrates who deals with it in the *Phaedo* and the *Phaedrus*. Meanwhile the Platonic Socrates pursues an argument in the *Meno* which he had left unfinished at the end of the *Protagoras* written immediately before. Aside from all this is the dramatic scene with Meno at the outset. The celebrated Thessalian Condottiere pays a tribute to the wide renown of Socrates when he protests that he will not report in Thessaly that Socrates does not know what virtue is. Not Athens, but all Greece had its eyes upon Socrates, but so has the implacable Anytus whose short colloquy with Socrates in the *Meno* (90 B-D) is one of the most inimitable

achievements of Plato as a playwright. 'I perceive, Socrates, you have a ready knack of taking people's characters away. Now, let me offer you a piece of good advice. Look out! In no city is it much trouble to take away from any man something more than his character. But here in Athens it is a matter of nothing at all. And you are just the man, to be perfectly aware of the fact. No need to tell you!'

In the Dialogues of Plato's second manner Socrates once more takes the lead as in the earlier and shorter Socratic Dialogues; but, partly on that account, he must be recognized as a Platonizing Socrates. The Dialogues in question are the *Cratylus*, the *Symposium*, the *Phaedo*, the *Republic*, the *Phaedrus*, the *Theaetetus*, and the *Parmenides*. Skilful characterization of Socrates, dramatically conceived and often wrought out with a far more practised sureness of hand than is shewn in his first period, meets us at every turn in the *Symposium*, the *Phaedo*, the *Republic*, and the *Theaetetus*, not to speak of the *Cratylus*. But the process — if a technical term may be slightly misused, — is more or less new. Plato seems to have grown fonder of what are called "Snapshots," instantaneous glimpses such as that of Socrates in a brown study,¹ Socrates at the moment when his irons have been removed,² or "sitting here in a curved posture,"³ Socrates with Polemarchus' servant plucking his cloak from behind,⁴ or Socrates seen in profile, having a snub nose and prominent eyes.⁵ The figure and the genius of Socrates flash out upon us in detached traits, postures, and the like, that are all the more effective because of the serried arguments in the midst of which they shine like so many familiar landmarks in strange realms of thought, regions unvisited by Socrates in the flesh. And yet the Platonizing Socrates is most at home in just these regions; he knows all Plato's own views and is often his pupil's mouthpiece, — he is in fact a far more fictitious being than the Platonic Socrates, from whom he differs in the degree in which purely philosophical pre-occupations have begun to encroach in Plato's mind upon the unrestricted play of his skill as a dramatist.

If we duly heed the only indications which Plato ever gives of the chronology of his works, dramatic ones like those given in the Prologue

¹ *Symposium*, 175 A.

² *Phaedo*, 60 B.

³ *Ibid.* 98 D.

⁴ *Republic*, 327 B.

⁵ *Theaetetus*, 209 C.

to the *Protagoras* and the opening scene of the *Gorgias*, or the pointed remark in the Prologue of the *Phaedo*¹ that Plato was absent on account of illness, we may confirm the view² that a new series of works is inaugurated by the *Cratylus*. There is, to begin with, neither prologue nor introductory scene in this Dialogue, but at the very outset the Platonizing Socrates is swept bodily into a discussion on the meaning and use of words in progress between Hermogenes and Cratylus.³ Socrates is thus at the very start carried off his own ground into a discussion under the dispensation⁴ of Cratylus. Astonishment is freely expressed by Socrates himself as well as by his interlocutors at the bold and confident way in which he gives an account of the development of language and at his reckless etymologies. 'You talk like one possessed,' says Hermogenes, and Socrates allows that Euthyphro has been lecturing him since day-break. He must have his fling to-day and, if necessary, he will go to a Priest to-morrow and be cleansed of the taint of possession.⁵ This entirely new mood, a most non-Socratic one, is made all the more conspicuous by the gullibility of Hermogenes.⁶ Cratylus, like Gorgias in the last of the Dialogues of portraiture, is long kept in the background, but for a very different dramatic purpose, as we perceive when he comes forward and pointedly approves of all that Socrates has said, 'not of himself, but under inspiration from some Muse or as the mouthpiece of Euthyphro.'⁷ After an *ex cathedra* pronouncement, in which he elaborates the Heraclitan doctrine of flux, Cratylus postpones the further enlightenment of Socrates to some future occasion. Socrates holds him to this promise, urging that he is young and may go far.⁸ The Dialogue then closes with Socrates and Hermogenes escorting Cratylus off the stage. The closing exhortation⁹ of Cratylus, which ends with a request that Socrates should give his best attention to the doctrine of

¹ 59 B.

² See note 5 on p. 165, and note 1 on p. 166.

³ The same sort of opening is used also in the *Philebus*.

⁴ 428 B, *μεμληκέν τέ μοι περὶ αὐτῶν καὶ ἴσως ἂν σε ποιησάμενη μαθητήν*.

⁵ 396 D, E. See also 428 D; *Phaedrus*, 235 C, and *Philebus*, 20 B and 25 B, C.

⁶ See Jowett's *Introduction*, pp. 261 f.

⁷ 428 D.

⁸ 440 D: *ἔτι γὰρ νέος εἶ καὶ ἡλικίαν ἔχεις*.

⁹ 440 E: *ἀλλὰ καὶ σὺ περὶ ἔτι ἐννοεῖν ταῦτα ἤδη*.

Heraclitus, drives home the impression, conveyed with cumulative insistency by all preceding dramatic turns and devices, that Socrates has been introduced into a different world from that in which he actually lived,—into the world of Plato and Aristotle.

The *Cratylus* gives, then, a preliminary sketch of Plato's second manner, and its dramatic construction emphasizes the un-Socratic note which characterizes the Platonizing Socrates. Thus it is marked out as the first in a series of works designed to carry Plato's thought beyond the range of his master Socrates, and in particular to find the bearings of Platonic thought with reference to the rival philosophies of Heraclitus¹ and the Eleatics. First after the *Cratylus* comes the *Symposium*, where Plato's skill as a playwright shows all its resources. Here the latent possibilities of the detached Prologue used in the *Protagoras* and the *Euthydemus* are developed with a new and striking result, noticeable in all the remaining Dialogues of Plato's second manner,² excepting only the *Phaedrus* and the *Republic*,—a work of such dimensions that its dramatic economy requires a special and lengthy discussion.³ This new use of an old device emphasizes the detachment of the Prologue by insisting⁴ upon a long lapse of time between it and the main Dialogue of which it is the dramatic frame, so to speak. In the *Phaedo* the detachment of the Prologue is made additionally complete, because it is separated from the main body of the Dialogue not only by a long lapse of years, but also by the distance from Athens to Phlius. The calm which Socrates requires⁵ in order to meet death is rendered absolutely unearthly by the setting of the prologue, a dialogue which takes place in the Alpine fastnesses of Peloponnesian Phlius. An analogous effect is quite as perfectly achieved, rather more smoothly indeed, in the two other works of Plato's second period, the *Republic* and the *Phaedrus*, where a change of scene is brought about, as in the *Gorgias*, and the *Lysis*, without a break. Here again Plato's second period shews an advance in

¹ For reflections strikingly appropriate on the threshold of Plato's second period of authorship, see Pater's *Plato and Platonism*, p. 2, *Init.*

² The *Phaedo*, the *Theaetetus*, and the *Parmenides*.

³ I need hardly say that there is no room in this article for such a discussion.

⁴ *Phaedo*, 57 A, B; *Symposium*, 172 C; *Theaetetus*, 142 C, D; *Parmenides*, 126 B, C.

⁵ *Phaedo*, 116 B and 117 D, E.

dramatic workmanship. In the *Republic*, a conversation begun in the brilliant bustle of a notable religious festival is continued in the sequestered calm of the house of Cephalus; in the *Phaedrus* Socrates and Phaedrus retire from the frequented road, conversing by the way, to the noon-day silence and shade of a plane-tree by the Ilissus. All this, on Aristotle's principle cited above,¹ must serve to point a contrast in the dramatic economy required by the Platonizing Socrates and that which best suited the Platonic Socrates. For, where the latter is concerned, we notice a change of scene from comparative silence to more bustling and distracting surroundings, *e.g.*: in the openings of the *Charmides*, the *Lysis*, the *Protagoras*, the *Euthydemus*, and the *Gorgias*. Plainly the Platonic Socrates, as is implied at the beginning of the *Apology*,² was most himself amid the everyday distractions of busy Athens from which Plato is at such pains to sequester the Platonizing Socrates.

The disenchantment of Plato, alluded to already,³ came after he had written the *Republic* and the *Phaedrus*, in the first of which, — the longest of his narrated Dialogues, — he declares⁴ that a *man who keeps himself in hand*, ὁ μέτριος ἀνὴρ, will be chary of repeating another's words as his own, will pick and choose and only omit "said he" and "he answered" when he approves of what is said. After this rejection of dramatic Dialogue on the ground that narrative is superior, we are scarcely prepared for the fact that Plato never again produced a Dialogue in strictly and consistently narrative form. That the *Phaedrus* was not a narrative, although written directly after the *Republic*, merely shews that Plato the playwright understood his business and refused to be bound by the letter of a puritanical self-denying ordinance passed by Plato the Moralist. Certainly the incongruity of attempting to throw the *Phaedrus* into a narrative form is self-evident. But it is one thing for Plato to disregard the letter of his own theory in order the more strictly to observe its Spirit,⁵ as he does in the *Phaedrus*, and quite

¹ See p. 167 *supra*, note.

² 17 C.

³ See p. 166.

⁴ 392 D–396 C.

⁵ The *Phaedrus* simply carries Plato's objection (of the *Republic*) to promiscuous dramatizing logically to its outcome, which rejects all forms of writing, — everything but the living speech.

another for him to indicate, as he does unmistakably both in the *Theaetetus*¹ and the *Parmenides*,² that the whole question as to narration or its absence is a matter of no great moment one way or the other.

Twelve years more or less of complete literary inactivity, during which Plato made his second journey to Syracuse, intervened between the production of the *Phaedrus*, in which literary production as such is ridiculed,³ and the writing of the *Theaetetus*.⁴ During this time Plato seems to have altered many views and to have reformed others; in particular his interest in dramatic workmanship seems to have been unconsciously undermined. For, after resuming authorship, he only produced two works of dramatic interest, — the *Theaetetus* and the *Parmenides*. In the *Theaetetus* at the close of a detached Prologue which normally requires to be followed by a narrative, Plato most undramatically drops the curtain and comes forward to explain⁵ that he is going to leave out "and I said," "he agreed," "he disagreed" and the like, in order to avoid repetitions. The *Parmenides* begins with a detached Prologue, followed by a narrated Dialogue; but suddenly, without any such warning as he gave in the *Theaetetus*,⁶ he completely abandons the use of "said I," "answered he," and the like. What is more, as far as may be, he expunges along with them the pronouns of the first and second persons singular together with all forms implying them, their place being filled by the first person plural. Here we have the strange spectacle of the playwright's consummate skill subtly contriving its own defeat, for Plato uses the practised resources of his art no longer to characterize contrasted speakers,

¹ 143 C.

² 173 D—end.

³ See p. 166.

⁴ I at least am convinced of this by considerations such as those of Mr. Lutoslawski's chapter on "The Reform of Plato's Logic," *Plato's Logic*, pp. 363–415. On Plato's visits to Sicily, see Freeman's *Sicily*, vol. IV.

⁵ 143 C.

⁶ It has been remarked that the personal forms of verbs of saying so common in other narrative dialogues give place to narrative Infinitives in the *Parmenides*, a narration narrated. In the short passage immediately preceding the sudden lapse of narration, pp. 136 E and 137 A, *εἶπεν* is used once, *φάται* four times, and *εἰπὲν* once. By massing these marks of the narrative at the point where he deliberately proposes to begin to ignore it, Plato seeks to hide his hand, so to speak. In fact, he succeeds in most cases, since few readers ever discover that the major part of *Parmenides* formally violates the requirements of a narrative dialogue.

but strains every nerve to blend into one two thinkers and talkers who personify little more than the play of successive phases of thought. Such is his determination to break down the barriers of personality throughout this long and arduous discussion¹ that he revives the obsolescent forms of the Dual and makes frequent use of them. Nothing of the dramatic play of incident and innuendo familiar to us in his earlier writings now remains, — nothing but the ebb and flow of affirmation and denial around “that which is” and “that which is not.” “Being” and “Not Being,” — which must serve our turn as Protagonist and Deuteragonist in this most metaphysical of Miracle-plays, — must be declared from the playwright’s point of view, to lack personal effectiveness and reality. Metaphysically viewed no doubt these chilling abstractions are above all reproach and deserve all respect, and yet we do not consciously wish to meet them again when the Dialogue is ended.

Plato has entered thus into a region where personal characterization appears to stand between him and the truth. For a moment he dreams of a transformation of the Dialogue into a sort of disembodied conversation between souls decorporealized, upsoaring and, like Dante and Beatrice, united by “*La concreata e perpetua sede Del deiforme regno.*”² Such a conversation Plato puts before us in the *Parmenides* having described it in the *Theaetetus*, where the Platonizing Socrates hesitatingly says: “I speak of what I scarcely understand; but the soul when thinking appears to me to be just talking — asking questions of herself and answering them, affirming and denying.”³ Such is the final term in the evolution of Plato as a playwright. The gulf between this conception of philosophic argument and that of the *Republic* and the *Phaedrus* is wide, wider still the difference between “Being” pitted against “Not Being” in the *Parmenides*, and Socrates using in his defense just the same sort of talk the Athenians heard him using every day in the market-place.⁴ The *Parmenides* in fact is Plato’s last dramatic experiment, and his stage is empty at the

¹ *Parmenides*, 137 D–166 C.

² *Paradiso*, II, 19.

³ Jowett’s translation of *Theaetetus*, 189 E and 190 A.

⁴ *Apology*, 17 C.

close. Empty it henceforward remained. Although he afterwards wrote Dialogues, such as the *Philebus*, they were Dialogues only in name. Perhaps his prophetic vision revealed to him at the last that there was no permanent function for the dramatic form as a vehicle of philosophic thought,—none apart from the unique personality of Socrates, beyond whose ken even he, the most devoted of disciples, was carried far, long before his work was done.